

H

HEBREW LANGUAGE

The Hebrew language of the books of *Psalms, *Job, *Proverbs, *Song of Songs, *Ecclesiastes, *Lamentations, *Ruth and *Esther stands at the margins of Hebrew grammar description. Standard descriptions of biblical Hebrew, especially treatments of its syntax, are based primarily on the prose texts of Genesis through 2 Kings (excluding Ruth in the Hebrew canonical order) because of observed differences between the prose and poetic literature, on the one hand, and between early (preexilic) and late (postexilic) compositions, on the other. These two issues are sometimes interrelated, as observed in Gesenius's Hebrew grammar: "Many of these poetic peculiarities occur in the kindred languages, especially in Aramaic, as the ordinary modes of expression, and probably are to be regarded largely as archaisms which poetry retained" (Kautzsch, 13). The present article surveys, first, prominent characteristics of Hebrew language in the poetic books and, second, the types of language variation that appear in the books treated within this volume and some of the explanations that have been proposed for these variations.

1. Hebrew Poetry
2. Language Variation
3. Conclusion

1. Hebrew Poetry.

Most readers distinguish poetry from prose instinctively, especially when it is arranged in verse. Biblical scholars are likewise well assured that a distinction between poetry and prose can be made within the literature of the Hebrew Bible. The books of Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Lamentations and Song of Songs have long been recognized as poetry, in part in the case of Psalms because of its ubiquitous musical nota-

tions and directions (e.g., musical notations such as *selâ* [71x]; directions in the psalm titles such as the title to Ps 4: "To the [music] director on stringed instruments").

However, versification of poetry in the Masoretic Text tradition is extremely rare (e.g., Ex 15; Deut 32) apart from the notable exception of *acrostic poems, in which the lineation is marked by successive letters of the alphabet (e.g., Pss 37; 111; 119; Lam 3). Therefore scholars have had to find other bases for distinguishing poetry from prose. They have proposed various poetic devices that feature prominently in Hebrew poetry as *constitutive* of Hebrew verse, including *meter, *parallelism and *ellipsis (see Cloete, chaps. 2-3). However, several features of the *language* of Hebrew poetry may be identified as partially distinguishing it from prose. These include the relative scarcity of "prose particles" in Hebrew poetry, the prevalence of rare, archaic or archaizing vocabulary and morphology, more loose or free word order, and the meanings and patterns of the verbal forms.

1.1. Prose Particles and Hebrew Poetry. The term "prose particles" has been applied to several grammatical words that are, statistically speaking, characteristic of Hebrew prose versus Hebrew poetry. D. N. Freedman (6-8) observed that the definite article, relative conjunction and the (untranslatable) marker of definite direct objects are relatively less frequent in poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible than in prose texts. F. I. Andersen and A. D. Forbes (165-83) have substantiated this observation with their statistical analysis of how often each of these grammatical words occurs in each chapter of the Hebrew Bible: chapters with five percent or less frequency for these grammatical words are found in the books of wisdom (Proverbs and Job), lyrical poetry (Psalms and Lamentation) and oracular po-

etry (mainly Hosea and Isaiah); chapters with five to ten percent occurrence of these grammatical words, while still properly poetic, occur mainly within the prophetic books (Andersen and Forbes, 166); higher percentages of frequency for these prose particles appear in texts classified as prose.

Andersen and Forbes (167) conclude that "the particle frequency is a powerful discriminator between poetry and prose"; however, they decline to elaborate on why these prose particles pattern as they do. A probable explanation for the infrequency of these grammatical words in poetry is the quality of *terseness, characteristic of Hebrew poetry and of poetry generally. A. Berlin (7) identifies terseness with poetic lines "stripped of all but their essential components." Terseness can be explained as the result of the balance between explicitness versus ellipsis and between redundancy versus ambiguity in Hebrew (and most) poetry. This balance entails restricting the use of explicit grammatical words such as the article (indefiniteness versus definiteness), relative conjunction (unmarked versus marked relative clauses) and direct object marker (unambiguous versus ambiguous argument structure) (see Berlin, 16).

This poetic characteristic of terseness is reflected in M. O'Connor's linguistic theory of Hebrew verse structure. O'Connor (138) defines Hebrew verse with a series of syntactic constrictors on poetic line length: poetic lines are limited to 0-3 clause predicators, 1-4 constituents and 2-5 units in length. These syntactic strictures on poetic line length further explain the relative paucity of prose particles in Hebrew verse: their use is partially constricted by the syntactic limitation on line length.

1.2. Vocabulary and Grammar of Hebrew Poetry. Hebrew poetry, especially archaic poetry, is characterized by the feature of rare or archaic vocabulary and word forms. Job and Song of Songs in particular have a high incidence of rare forms and *hapax legomena* (Greenspahn, 199-200). Statistically, rare vocabulary is found predominantly in the poetry rather than the prose portions of the Bible (Greenspahn, 38-39). In addition, words that occur commonly throughout prose and poetry often have more rare counterparts that are limited to poetry (see Sáenz-Badillos, 60). For example, *šm* ("hear") occurs over one thousand times throughout the Hebrew Bible, whereas the denominative verb

ʿzn ("hear") occurs just forty-two times, twenty-two times in the poetry of Psalms, Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, another nine times in the poetic prophetic literature of Isaiah and Hosea (see 1.1 above on "prose particle" frequency in these books), and once each in the archaic poems in Exodus 1; Deuteronomy 32; Judges 5. Similarly, of the fifty-six occurrences of *pʿl* ("do"), the poetic counterpart of *ʿsh* ("do"), forty-one are in Psalms, Job and Proverbs, with most of the remainder occurring in Isaiah, Hosea or the archaic poems of Exodus 15 and Numbers 23.

In addition to rare vocabulary, rare forms, or morphemes, are found in Hebrew poetry. For example, the third-person suffix *-mw* occurs nine and seven times, respectively, in the archaic poems of Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32, six times each in Psalm 59 and Psalm 73, five times in Psalm 2, and nineteen times in Job (Young 1993, 125-26). Similarly, the so-called *hiriq compagnis*—a suffixed long-*i* vowel, is mostly confined to poetry, both early and late (e.g., Deut 33:16; Ps 113:5, 6, 7, 9). The asseverative and vocative meanings for the *lamed* preposition, though paralleled in other Northwest Semitic languages, occurs in the Bible only in poetry—for example, *ky lyhwh* ("for truly Yahweh [is]") in Psalm 89:18 (MT 89:19), and *lrkb* ("O rider") in Psalm 68:34 (MT 68:35).

Although the syntax of biblical Hebrew word order is still not fully understood, it is widely recognized that Hebrew word order is less rigidly fixed in poetry than in prose, as is the case in many other languages (Watson, 49). Conventions of word order are often abandoned in poetry for the sake of verbal artistry, the most commonly noted perhaps being the inverted word order, or *chiasm. Chiastic word order in Hebrew poetry usually involves presenting the units of one line in inverse order from that of the preceding line. For example, compare the following two verses, where the first orders the elements the same way in the two lines (a-b-c / a'-b'-c'), while the second orders the constituents in chiastic order (a-b-c / c'-b'-a').

mnšmt ʿlwh yʿbdw / wmrwh ʿpw yklw
By-the-breath-of God they-perish / and-by-
the-blast-of his-anger they-are-consumed (Job
4:9)

yšwb ʿmlw brʿšw / wʿl qdqdw hmsw yrd
Will-return his-own-mischief on-his-own-head

/and-upon his-head his-own-violence will-descend (Ps 7:16 [MT 7:17])

Peculiarities in the use of the verb forms in poetry is perhaps as much overstated as the looseness of word order. Influenced by the apparently radically different meanings for the verbal system in Ugaritic prose and epic poetry, scholars have been unduly swayed towards treating the verbal system of Hebrew poetry as completely distinct from that of prose (e.g., Niccacci, 194). However, one of the hallmarks of poetry is the flouting of language conventions that are well established in prose. Thus it would appear that the meanings/functions of the verb forms in prose are foundational for interpreting the forms in poetry.

Nevertheless, the vicissitudes of the history of the Hebrew language are such as to have created partial homonyms among several prefixed verb conjugations in biblical Hebrew. As a result, some verb forms are ambiguous among the imperfect, jussive and past conjugations. The past conjugation is of special interest because it is the most frequent verb form in prose, where it regularly occurs with a unique, distinguishing *wa-* prefixed conjunction. Not surprisingly, in poetry where particles such as the article and conjunction are often absent, this distinguishing *wa-* prefix is often missing from instances of the past conjugation in poetry—for example, *ybq^c* (Ps 78:15); *yšt* (Ps 18:11 [MT 18:12]) (cf. *wayyšt* [2 Sam 22:12]).

Although none of the features of the Hebrew language enumerated here are alone determinative of poetry, together they illustrate general characteristics of Hebrew poetry. J. Kugel (302) observes, “‘Prose’ and ‘poetry’ are a matter of degree”; by contrast, it is the closely associated distinction between prose and verse that may be dichotomized (Cloete, 5).

2. Language Variation.

The language of the Hebrew Bible presents numerous grammatical and syntactic peculiarities. Various contributing factors to this state of affairs may be pointed out, including the approximate thousand-year time span in which the literature developed, differences in style among multiple authors and editors, and distinctive grammatical features peculiar to different genres.

Despite widespread regard for the “harmo-

nizing activity of the Masoretes,” biblical scholars have long recognized variation in the language of the Hebrew Bible (Kautzsch, vii, 12). The traditional framework for treating these divergences recognizes two or three diachronic divisions and one primary synchronic division in the language of the Hebrew Bible. Diachronically, it is customary to distinguish between the language in those books dated to the postexilic period based on their content (e.g., Esther, Chronicles) and the language of books that have been traditionally seen as largely preexilic in origin (e.g., Ruth, Joshua—Kings). This bipartite division between Late (postexilic) Biblical Hebrew (LBH) and Standard (preexilic) Biblical Hebrew (SBH) is often made into a tripartite division by the additional distinction of Early Biblical Hebrew (EBH), thought to be attested in archaic poems dated to the early preexilic period based on grammar and motifs (e.g., Ex 15; Judg 5; Ps 29). Synchronically, scholars have posited dialectal differences in Hebrew between Northern (Israelite) Hebrew and Southern (Judahite) Hebrew (e.g., Rendsburg). Scholars have held that the majority of SBH compositions are written in the Southern Hebrew dialect and, concomitantly, reflect concerns surrounding the Davidic dynasty and the Jerusalem temple (e.g., the Deuteronomistic History).

The effect of these diachronic and synchronic divisions can be seen in the way biblical scholars have judged compositions that lack clear historical referents as to their provenance and date: those compositions whose language diverges significantly from the norm of SBH (attested in the prose of Genesis through Kings) are identified as either late compositions, thus belonging to the corpus of LBH, or early but northern in origin, having been written or influenced by a Northern Israelite Hebrew dialect. This is exemplified by the remark of S. R. Driver (449) that the linguistic peculiarities in Song of Songs “show either that it must be a late work (post-exilic), or, if early, that it belongs to *North Israel*.” A good deal of the material that is the focus of the present article falls within this category of compositions that lack clear historical referents, written in language that often diverges from the language of SBH; this characterization is particularly true of much of the book of Psalms, and the books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. As a result, scholars

and commentators have scrutinized the language in these books in attempts to establish their provenances and dates as well as to in turn use them to establish a coherent picture of the synchronic and diachronic variations in the Hebrew language discernable in the Bible.

However, some scholars have increasingly called into question this standard diachronic-synchronic framework as alternative explanations come to light for the language variation found in these books (e.g., the essays in Young 2003). For example, it has come to be widely held now that the Hebrew language of the post-biblical period developed from colloquial Hebrew of the biblical period, in contrast to the literary language in the Bible itself (Ullendorff, 11). Hence, it has been proposed that many of the linguistic peculiarities traditionally identified as Northern Israelite may simply be colloquialisms that have surfaced in the otherwise literary language of the Bible (Fredericks 1996). It has also been suggested that certain variations in language are intentional and rhetorical, such as dialectic features found in the speech of non-Israelite characters (Kaufman, 55). Finally, one scholar has explained certain language variation in the Bible in terms of an oral or a literary origin for the literature (Polak).

Given these multiple alternative explanations for language variation in the Hebrew Bible, the state of the question is more unsettled now than ever before. The situation is made especially difficult by the constant threat of falling into viciously circular arguments or special pleading with respect to the data. In the remainder of the present article some of the more notable peculiarities in these books are discussed with reference to these alternative explanations.

2.1. Psalms. On one level, *form criticism has isolated formulaic characteristics in the language in the book of Psalms, which has enabled the identification of various psalm types such as psalm of *lament, *hymn, and *thanksgiving psalm. On another level, the language of Psalms is largely resistant to other types of classification (see Driver, 383). Nevertheless, elements of the language (especially vocabulary) of certain psalms along with the much weightier evidence of motifs reminiscent of Canaanite culture (especially as exemplified in Ugaritic literature) have been used to date several psalms to the tenth century BC or earlier (e.g., Pss 18; 29; 68). For example, H. L. Ginsburg argued already in

1935 that Psalm 29 is based on a Phoenician original. Thirty years later M. Dahood (175) noted that “virtually every word in the psalm can now be duplicated in older Canaanite texts.” In addition, Dahood observed similar parallelism structures in Psalm 29 as in Ugaritic poetry, as exemplified by the following two examples, which exhibit an a-b-c / a'-b'-d / a'-b'-e pattern.

hbw lyhwh bny 'lm / hbw lyhwh kbwd w'z / hbw lyhwh kbwd šmw

Give to-the-LORD, sons-of-God / give to-the-LORD honor-and-strength / give to-the-LORD the-honor-of-his-name (Ps 29:1-2)

klb arḥ l'gh / klb tat limrh / km lb 'nt atr b'l
Like-the-heart-of a-heifer for-her-calf / like-the-heart-of a-ewe for-her-lamb / so-(is) the-heart-of-Anat toward-Baal (CAT 1.6 IL.28-30; Gibson, 77)

G. A. Rendsburg has sought to show that the language of certain psalms is evidence of dialectic differences between Northern Hebrew and Southern Hebrew. He identified Psalms 9—10; 16; 29; 36; 45; 53; 58; 74; 116; 132—133; 140—141, the Korah collection (Pss 42—49; 84—85; 87—88) and the Asaph collection (Pss 50; 73—83) as having Northern Hebrew features in their language (see Asaph and Sons of Korah). Rendsburg identifies rare linguistic characteristics that are cognate with other Northwest Semitic languages as evidence of Northern Hebrew dialectic influence—for example, the second-person feminine *-kī* (versus *-k*) and the third-person masculine *-ḥī* (versus *-āyw*) in Psalm 116: 7, 12, 19, both of which are identical to the Aramaic forms of the suffixes; the use of the relative words *zē/zu* and *še* in Psalms 9:15 (MT 9:16); 10:2; 133:2-3 (versus the prose particle relative *ʾāšer*), which have cognates in Ugaritic, Phoenician and Aramaic; and the Phoenician plural form *ʾišim* (“men”) in Psalm 141:4 (versus the usual *ānāšim*).

In addition, Rendsburg identifies linguistically conservative features as evidence of Northern Hebrew dialectic influence, including the feminine noun termination *-at* (versus the usual *-ā*) in Psalms 16:5-6; 53:1; 74:19; 88:1; 132:4, which is also cognate with the other Northwest Semitic languages, and the retainment of the third *yōd* root letter in verb forms where it generally elides in the biblical Hebrew forms—for exam-

ple, *yehšayūn* versus *yehšū* in Psalm 36:7 (MT 36:8) (see also Ps 36:9; 73:2; 77:4; 78:44; 83:3; 140:3).

2.2. Proverbs. The international connections of biblical Wisdom literature are well known. They are most clear in the parallel between Proverbs 22:17–24:22 and the Egyptian *Words of Amenemope*. However, Proverbs 30–31 also attests to the international character of wisdom literature. Many commentators translate Proverbs 30:1 as, “The words of Agur, son of Yaqeh, the Massaite,” a reading confirmed by “The words of Lemuel, king of Massa” (Prov 31:1) (e.g., Murphy 1998, 225). Elsewhere in the Bible “Massa” refers to a people or tribe from northern Arabia, related to Ishmael (see Gen 25:14; 1 Chron 1:30).

The language in these chapters underscores their international flavor. The Aramaic word for “son,” *bar* (versus Heb *bēn*), appears in Proverbs 31:2, and Proverbs 31:3 contains a masculine plural noun ending in the letter *nūn*, as in Aramaic and Moabite, in contrast to Hebrew, in which masculine plural nouns end with the letter *mēm*. The enigmatic phrase *lē’îh’el* in Proverbs 30:1 makes sense as an Aramaic palindrome: “I am not God” (see Murphy 1998, 226). The odd use of *mah* (“what”) in Proverbs 31:2, it has been suggested, should be understood as cognate to Arabic *mah* (imperative “hear”) (see Murphy 1998, 239).

2.3. Job. The book of Job shares the international flavor of wisdom literature found also in Proverbs. A veneer of internationalism is created by the names and locations of the principal characters (Job 1:1; 2:11). However, nowhere is the international character of the book more apparent than in its language, which has been described as a Northern Hebrew dialect, an admixture of Hebrew, and a translation of an Aramaic or Arabic original (see Andersen, 55–61; Gordis, 161, 343 n. 16; Young 1993, 132). In all cases, the book of Job is renowned for the difficulties posed by its rich (e.g., four names for “lion,” six words for “trap,” four synonyms for “darkness” [Gordis, 160]) and often abstruse vocabulary (over one hundred *hapax legomena* [see Greenspahn, 199]).

Particularly noteworthy are the “Aramaisms” and “Arabisms” in Job—that is, features of grammar and vocabulary that are shared with or explained only by recourse to one or the other of these languages. Job shares grammatical fea-

tures (e.g., masculine plural noun ending *-in* instead of the customary *-im*) as well as vocabulary (e.g., *ma’ābād* [“work”] in Job 34:25, versus Heb *ma’āsē*) with Aramaic, and Arabic has been the source of understanding for many of Job’s obscure words.

In addition, the book of Job exhibits features characteristic of early (archaic) poetry (e.g., third person suffix *-mō*, preservation of the third root letter *w* or *y*, enclitic *mēm*, relative *zē* [see Saénz-Badillos, 60]) and of late biblical Hebrew compositions (e.g., the verb *qbl* [“receive”]). However, many of these same features can be explained from language contact or as features of a Northern Hebrew dialect, in which case they have no bearing on the dating of the composition (see 2.1 above).

In all, the features of Job have resisted a consensus explanation. Neither the content nor the language of the book points to a definite time or place of composition. Although the theory that the book is a translation of an Aramaic or Arabic original is not seriously entertained anymore, if the international character of wisdom literature is taken seriously, an alternative explanation emerges that the book of Job is a non-Israelite composition, written in a closely related Canaanite dialect, such as Edomite (see Young 1993, 136).

2.4. Ruth. The book of Ruth presents an intriguing mixture of language elements that are associated with SBH and with LBH. This mixture admits of different explanations: some features may be truly archaic, others represent the intentional use of archaic language (i.e., archaizing), and others may be characteristic of a particular Hebrew dialect (Campbell, 25). F. Bush, in his commentary, presents an extensive list of those features that the language of Ruth shares with SBH and those that it shares with LBH, and he concludes that the split in the book should be explained by dating the composition to the exilic period, during the transition from SBH to LBH.

Bush (21), adopting Hurvitz’s approach to determining features of LBH, notes that the criteria for identifying a feature as LBH include (1) that it be widely distributed throughout the known postexilic books (e.g., Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Daniel, Zech 9–14), and (2) that it contrast with an alternative form of expression in SBH. Some of the SBH features that Bush (23–24) isolates in Ruth include the preference for

the longer first-person pronoun *’ānōkī* versus *’ānī*, the productive use of the past narrative verb form, the defective spelling of “David” (*dwd* versus *dwyd*), and the use of the dual pronominal suffix, which, while rare in SBH, is wholly absent in LBH. Some of the LBH features of Ruth include the greater frequency (versus SBH texts) of objects suffixed directly to verbs, the greater frequency (versus SBH texts) of the preposition *l* rather than *’l* following the verb “say,” the occurrence of *qwm* in the Piel stem with the meaning “confirm, establish, effect” (Ruth 4:7), and the use of perfect with the *waw* conjunction in a successive chain of events (Ruth 4:7) (Bush, 26–27).

Bush assumes that each datum is characteristic of either SBH or LBH, and that therefore the mixture of features found in Ruth is determinative of a date of composition that lies between these two stages of language. The simplicity of Bush’s paradigm is evident when one considers the possibility of alternative explanations for mixtures of features. For example, Bush claims that *wēnātan* (perfect with *waw* conjunction) in Ruth 4:7 functions like the past narrative verb, which is the expected form here (i.e., *wayyittēn*). However, the verse may not be presenting a past narrative, as Bush assumes, but rather a past hypothetical or habitual situation: “a man *would remove* his sandal and *would give* it to the other party.” The use of the past narrative verb is unexpected here; rather, the perfect forms found here express irreal mood, indicated by the verb-subject word order (see Cook, 134–35).

2.5. Esther. Unlike the other books examined here, the setting of the story of Esther provides a decisive *terminus a quo* for the book, in the Persian period. This means that the language of Esther must belong to the later stage of biblical Hebrew. Nevertheless, several different judgments have been rendered on the language in Esther. C. A. Moore (lvii) characterized the language of Esther as being most similar to the LBH of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. By contrast, R. Polzin (74–75) has argued that Esther is imitative of SBH, in contrast to the LBH of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, and R. Bergy (followed by Bush, 296–97) has more recently placed the language of Esther between LBH and Mishnaic Hebrew (MH).

Some of the features that Esther shares with MH against LBH compositions include the following: the gerund noun construction (*hštyh*) in

Esther 1:8, which uses a noun pattern typical of MH and would be expressed with an infinitive in SBH and LBH compositions; vocabulary such as *keter* (“crown” [Esther 1:11]), *ma’amar* (“command” [Esther 1:15]), *yšt* (“reach out” [Esther 4:11]), *šarbiṭ* (“scepter” [Esther 4:11]) and *illū* (“if” [Esther 7:4a]); idioms such as *gwr ’l* (“decree” [Esther 2:1], versus SBH *šwh ’l*), *šnh mn* (“be different from” [Esther 3:8], versus SBH *’hr*) and *kāšēr lipnē* (“be acceptable before” [Esther 8:5]).

2.6. Song of Songs. The language of Song of Songs is striking in several ways. Most notable is its use of the relative conjugation *še* to the almost complete exclusion of *’āšer* (which occurs only in Song 1:1). Only the book of Ecclesiastes has more occurrences of *še*; however, it employs *’āšer* with almost equal frequency. This feature has been taken to be indicative of Aramaic influence or late date, especially in light of the similar, almost exclusive use of *še* in Mishnaic Hebrew. However, such conclusions are problematic in light of the appearance of *še* in archaic Hebrew poetry (Judg 5:7), and the judgment that *še* alternatively may be indicative of a Northern Hebrew dialect (see 2.1 above).

Evidence of foreign influence in Song of Songs is found in its occasional Aramaic spellings and foreign loanwords. The Aramaic spelling of *ntr* (“keep, guard”), versus Hebrew *nšr*, is found in several places in the book (Song 1:6; 8:11, 12), and in one passage the Aramaic spelling *bērôt* (“juniper”), versus Hebrew *bērōš* (Song 1:17), is used. The word *pardēs* (Song 4:13), often translated “park” or “enclosures,” is a Persian loanword; *appiryôn* (Song 3:9), variously translated “palanquin” (NRSV) or “chariot” (NIV), is possibly a Greek loanword.

The other striking linguistic feature is the number of *hapax legomena*, thirty-seven in all. Given the size of the book, it contains the highest proportion of such terms of any book in the OT. In addition, F. E. Greenspahn (199) classifies fourteen of these thirty-seven as “absolute *hapax legomena*”—that is, forms built on roots that are not used anywhere else in the Bible (see also Murphy 1990, 75).

2.7. Ecclesiastes. More than any of the other books under discussion here, Ecclesiastes has been at the center of discussions regarding the development of the Hebrew language (note particularly the several monographs from the late 1980s and early 1990s: Isaksson; Fredericks

1988; Schoors). The judgment by F. Delitzsch (190), made in the nineteenth century, on the language of Ecclesiastes is well known: "If the book of Koheleth were of old Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language." Despite the confidence expressed by this assessment of the chronological place of the language of Ecclesiastes, various explanations have been offered regarding the unique features of the book's language. These include that the book was originally composed in Aramaic and translated (poorly) into Hebrew; that it was written by an Israelite living in Phoenicia, and therefore is heavily influenced by Phoenician; that it is written in Northern Israelite Hebrew; and that it is reflective of spoken or colloquial (versus literary) Hebrew (see Seow, 20).

Perhaps a certain degree of truth about the matter may be found in each of these explanations. That it is post-Solomonic seems assured from its use of Persian loanwords—notably *pitgām* ("decision, announcement" [Eccles 8:11]) and *pardēs* ("park" [Eccles 2:5]). Features that have been identified as Phoenician and therefore "early," such as the feminine *-at* ending (versus Hebrew *-ā*), are also found in LBH (see Seow, 15). D. M. Gropp (34) has argued that the Aramaic *šlyt* ("ruler") is current only during the Persian period, after which *raššay* replaces it, seemingly placing Ecclesiastes firmly in the Persian period. Ecclesiastes shares features such as the frequent use of *še* (136x in the Bible, 68x Ecclesiastes) with other books identified as dialectically Northern, as Song of Songs (Seow, 17).

Several other features of the language of Ecclesiastes are outstanding. First and foremost is the high number of *hapax legomena* and unique expressions in the book. Some of the more notable ones from Delitzsch's long list include the use of the *ānī* form of the first-person pronoun exclusive of the *ʾānōkī* form, the use of the direct-object marker *ʾet* with indefinite objects, the *zō* form of the feminine demonstrative pronoun, and the negation of the infinitive by *ʾen* (Delitzsch, 190-98; see also Seow, 17-19).

3. Conclusion.

The peculiarities in the language of the books surveyed here have attracted the greatest attention among the books in the Hebrew Bible from those attempting to untangle the history and varieties of Hebrew in antiquity. The traditional approach ultimately presents itself as a dichot-

mous model in which SBH is set up as the "norm" with which other varieties of Hebrew language are compared. This is evident from the large group of shared features in EBH, LBH and Northern Israelite Hebrew. This pattern of shared features calls these traditional divisions into question and raises the possibility of alternative explanations for the varieties of Hebrew found in the Bible.

Alternative explanations must take into account variation arising from possible diglossia (i.e., the coexistence of a literary language and a colloquial language) and other differences in registry, the affect of genre and subject matter on language, and the difficulty of distinguishing between archaic language (i.e., the use of older forms of language, often indicative of early compositions) and archaisms (i.e., the intentional use of older forms of language in mimicry of earlier compositions). Similarly, judgments on "loanwords" are notoriously difficult to make, in terms of what sort of influence one language might have had on another and in terms of dating.

These questions are often driven by ideological concerns, such as what are acceptable and unacceptable dates for biblical compositions, an undue pessimism about finding answers to these questions, or an a priori commitment to the lateness of all of biblical culture and writings. Positively, the current debate opens up possibilities of new approaches and answers to these questions.

See also ELLIPSIS; PARALLELISM.

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HEMISTICH. See POETICS, TERMINOLOGY OF.

HERMENEUTICS

The word *hermeneutics* is used with varying meanings. This article treats it as a way of looking at the process involved in interpreting texts, the methods that we use, and the approaches that can open up their understanding. In doing exegesis, we seek to understand a text in its original context, in accordance with its own agenda and priorities; we may then move from exegesis to application. When we talk in terms of hermeneutics, we imply a recognition that even our exegetical study is affected by who we are—the questions that occupy us, the culture that we belong to, the way our church has taught us, our personal experience, whether we are wealthy or poor, whether we are male or female, and so on. Further, the process of understanding Scripture is not linear (as the exegesis-application model implies). There is an ongoing both-ways relationship between focusing on a passage's meaning in its own right and focusing on its significance for us in light of questions that concern us. This is as true of historical and critical study as it is of other approaches because the concerns, aims and methods of historical and critical study come from a particular culture, and historical-critical study discovers from the text what its methods allow. All this does not mean